

By Darlene Superville, Associated Press

Insisting insulation is "sexy," President Barack Obama called Tuesday for new federal incentives to make millions of homes more energy efficient as a way to create jobs, save money for homeowners and reduce pollution.

Speaking at a suburban Virginia Home Depot store cleared of shoppers, Obama said he wants Congress to provide temporary incentives to encourage consumers to rush out and buy such items as insulation, new windows and doors, and caulk to plug leaks where they live.

Obama said homes and offices are responsible for 40 percent of U.S. energy consumption, and that homes built in the first half of the last century can use about 50 percent more energy than modern dwellings.

"The simple act of retrofitting these buildings to make them more energy efficient — installing new windows and doors, insulation, roofing, sealing leaks, modernizing heating and cooling equipment — is one of the fastest, easiest and cheapest things we can do to put Americans back to work while saving families money and reducing harmful emissions," Obama said, standing in front of a water heater and bales of insulation.

It was the fourth time in less than two weeks that Obama has staged a high-profile event to call attention to his efforts to curb unemployment, which dropped slightly to 10 percent in November.

He called last week for a series of steps to spur job creation — small-business tax cuts, new money for roads and bridges, and tax breaks for home energy-efficiency projects. The administration hasn't put a price tag on the plan, but lawmakers have said it could cost more than \$150 billion. Obama has suggested using money left over from the \$700 billion financial industry bailout to pay for the initiatives.

The White House hopes a home energy-efficiency program will be as appealing to consumers

as the now-expired Cash for Clunkers effort, which accelerated car and truck sales by offering rebates to people who traded in used vehicles for more fuel-efficient ones.

Obama said he disagreed with those who think energy efficiency isn't glamorous.

"Here's what's sexy about it: saving money," he said at the Alexandria, Va., home improvement store. He spoke to about 40 people representing small businesses, laborers, contractors, community members, environmental groups and some workers being trained to weatherize homes. Several members of Congress also attended, and some donned orange aprons over their suit jackets.

Environmental groups and at least one member of Congress applauded the president.

Maggie L. Fox, president of the Alliance for Climate Protection, said such an investment would be a "significant down payment on the creation of a new weatherization industry right here at home." Obama says jobs such as installing windows in homes cannot be moved overseas.

"This is a hat trick," said Rep. Peter Welch, a Democrat from Vermont, where a similar weatherization effort began a decade ago. He also is the sponsor of a bill in Congress to create the program Obama envisions.

"It's good jobs in every community, it's savings in every home and it's lower carbon emissions," Welch said.

About \$8 billion of the \$787 billion economic stimulus bill is dedicated to energy-saving investments in homes.